



Montgomery County Council

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COUNCIL RELEASES "WHITE PAPER" ON STRATEGIES TO COMBAT DRUNK DRIVING, UNDERAGE DRINKING

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The Montgomery County Council today released a report from its Office of Legislative Oversight which surveys strategies used throughout the United States for reducing alcohol-impaired driving and underage drinking.

The report also presents facts about drunk driving and underage drinking, charts progress made over the past twenty years, and highlights empirical research results on the effectiveness of various approaches and sanctions aimed at reducing the problem.

"I think this report is an excellent roadmap for attacking the problem of drunk driving in Montgomery County," said Councilmember Marilyn Praisner. "This is obviously a complex problem that demands a complex response. There is no one easy answer."

"This report is an incredibly valuable tool for us as we figure out the most effective way to keep drunk drivers off the road and alcohol out of the hands of kids," said Councilmember Howard Denis, who will testify on Thursday in Annapolis before a Senate panel which is considering tougher drunk driving laws.

Among the facts documented by the report:

- * 9,379 fewer alcohol-related fatalities in the United States in 1999 than in 1982 – a 38 percent decrease;

- * Alcohol-related traffic deaths represent 38 percent of all traffic deaths, as opposed to 57 percent in 1982 – a 20 percent decrease;

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- * 308,000 persons were injured in accidents where police say alcohol was present – one person every two minutes;
- * 60 percent of fatal crashes involving alcohol occurred at night
- * 51 percent of fatal crashes involving alcohol occurred on the weekend;
- * The probability of being arrested for alcohol-impaired driving is very low – estimates range from 1 arrest every 200 impaired trips to 1 arrest every 1,000 impaired trips;
- * Over 1.5 million persons were arrested for driving under the influence in 1999 – one of every ten arrests, with one-third being repeat offenders;
- * The number of young people killed in fatal accidents involving alcohol decreased 63 percent between 1982 and 1999 – from 2,763 to 1,011.
- * 42 percent of intoxicated drivers in fatal accidents were speeding, as compared to 14 percent of sober drivers;
- * Alcohol-related crashes cost \$45 billion a year, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.
- * Survey of high school seniors in 1999 showed that only 51 percent had had a drink in the previous month – compared with 72 percent in 1980;
- * Underage youth are successful in buying alcohol about half the time; and
- * Only about 5 out of every 100,000 occasions of underage youth drinking result in sanctions against an alcohol outlet.

As to what strategies work to discourage drunk driving and underage drinking, the report offered the following:

- * Raising the drinking age to 21 and showing “zero tolerance” to offenders under 21 works;
- * Enhanced state and local enforcement efforts work, including well-publicized sobriety checkpoints;
- * Implementation of comprehensive community programs that targets a range of (more...)

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risky driving behaviors is effective;

- * Suspension of licenses works because, even though 75 percent of those suspended still drive, they drive less and more carefully. License suspension and vehicle impoundment reduce the rate of repeat offenders;

- * A combination of treatment and sanctions is necessary – education alone is not enough; and

- * Evidence is inconclusive on whether jail terms are more effective than any other sanctions for first-time or repeat offenders – or if diversion programs reduce recidivism.

This is the first of three Office of Legislative Oversight “white papers” on the issue commissioned by the Council. The second, examining Montgomery County’s laws and programs, is due in late March.

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Copies of the full report are available by calling 240-777-7939.